

A Notes on the President's Speech

17

These notes were dictated on November 4, 1969, when a group of congressmen—gathered for discussion in an adjoining congressional office—requested background commentary on implications of the President's speech of November 3rd describing and defending his Vietnam policy.

¶ Last night the President picked up a fallen standard, and proclaimed it Nixon's War. On a closer look, the war he proposed to continue is dismayingly close to Johnson's War: a commitment to the pursuit in Vietnam of unattainable ends, open-ended in time, cost, and the use of American fire power against Vietnamese.

¶ The cost in U.S. troops deployed and U.S. casualties suffered in any one year, will be less than the levels of recent years, at least so long as a "lull" persists. *However,*

¶ Hanoi leadership will have the capability to inflict those casualties, perhaps at a high price to themselves; all past behavior ~~reveals~~ *indicates* that they will pay that price. What we have to look forward to from this policy is a future like the past: of lulls and "Têts," a cycle of VC inactivity and activity, with no clear limit to the deaths we suffer or inflict. There is no hint in the President's speech—with its emphasis on the vital interest that would be risked by ~~extrication~~ *withdrawal* and its silence on the values lost by continuation of our involvement—that he recognizes any limit at all to the total price he

¶ Preface to home
don't—perhaps
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to include
the impact of
this speech
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itals

¶ To be sure,

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and to end
the "lull"

withdrawal

Notes on Pres. Speech (17)

Add prefatory material to come?

It's OK?

Preface to precede (A) head?

(A1) date? ~~unmarked~~

Notes on Pres Speech (17)

2 ll from bottom

note marginal comment

(terms of)

social conflict

would be willing to pay in American lives, treasure, and cohesion to avoid or postpone the possible unfavorable consequences of American disengagement.

twenty

viewed

Nixon's description of the course leading to the unconditional withdrawal of American forces from Vietnam as a "popular and easy course" is spurious. If the way out of Vietnam had ever been perceived as unequivocally popular, easy, and politically safe over the last 20 years of our involvement, it would surely have recommended itself in one or another crisis as the course to follow. The fact is that now—as in the past—getting out is ~~seen~~ as the hard, uncertain, and politically dangerous course compared to the better-known and more controllable risks of staying in—that is, of postponing a decision to disengage—"one more year."

always murky

Whose quote?

A decision to withdraw totally within, say, one year, brings within the horizon of political foresight such possible consequences as communist takeover, political reprisals, and ensuing recrimination within the United States. Perhaps the only time that an American president could bring himself to accept these risks (when the alternative of continuing the war and at least postponing any such reckoning looked militarily viable) would be when he could claim to be cutting losses incurred entirely by a predecessor.

and

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The President implies that the advice he received early in his term to close out "Johnson's War" was politically cynical. Yet in practical terms, it might have pointed the most promising way out of this war, in the interest of all Americans and most Vietnamese.

The most disheartening and ominous aspect of his speech was the President's willingness to accept the appellation "Nixon's War." All recent experience suggests that for a president to allow himself to become personally identified with the course of this conflict is to threaten its indefinite prolongation, at least during his administration.

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Notes Pres Speech (18)

line 15

see marginal query
delete quote marks

Notes Pres Speech (18)

line 21

See marginal query
words to be substituted. ?

The previous
peace has
been the
most ominous

~~Equally~~ ominous is the notion that "peace" is to be "won," and by us: that it must be "America's peace."

91 Almost as

as

Although the President does not, in fact, specify America's aims in Vietnam in any detail, his policy appears designed, still, to win an American victory: not a victory so ambitious as sometimes conceived in the past, but still, in terms of a peace that would clearly be recognized by the opposing side as defeat. Yet neither his speech nor any other evidence available suggests any basis for believing that the Hanoi leadership and their followers will ever stop fighting in acceptance of those terms.

What will happen assuming they do fight on?

The President's military advisors have always told him that the most to be hoped for in any program of re-equipping and training the Vietnamese armed forces is that they will be able to hold their own against VC forces alone, perhaps with some ~~level~~ of North Vietnamese "fillers"; and even that cannot be achieved until 1972. They have held out no hope that these forces will be able to confront successfully any sizable number of North Vietnamese regular forces at any time in the future, without U.S. air and logistical support. Indeed, at no point in his speech does the President refer to a possibility that the U.S. would ever be able to withdraw such support entirely. The policy he offers supposes an indefinite commitment of ~~100-200 thousand~~ U.S. military personnel subject to risk and engaged in killing Vietnamese. . . .

small number

100,000 to 200,000

"Vietnamization," of course, is a concept that goes back well before the last half year of the Johnson Administration. The impending failure of a policy of relying entirely upon the Vietnamese forces—trained and equipped by Americans since 1954—led the Joint Chiefs of Staff to recommend the commitment of American ground troops as early as 1961, although opposing guerrilla forces were minuscule by later standards. The

Nixon's announcement
of it or before

at the time

Doesn't he
wonder if
there's a
policy?

next three years saw, instead, a more costly and urgent program of Vietnamization, supplemented by American advisors. Not only were the opposing forces weaker throughout this period than at present, but the military leadership of the Vietnamese armed forces was generally better, and the political leadership (up to 1963), for all its fatal flaws, was more nationalistic, respected, and efficient, than any since. Yet, American troops were committed to Vietnam in 1965 when that program, too, was about to collapse. . . .

The President describes "only two choices open to us if we want to end the war": a "precipitate" withdrawal of all Americans or a slow, contingent reduction of forces with no definite end. Yet, in fact, virtually all of the proposals recently heard within Congress for bringing our involvement to a definite conclusion lie between the two courses he mentions, since not one of them can justly be said to call for "precipitate" withdrawal.

Nixon worries, as did his predecessors, about a domestic political "hand-over" from withdrawal: after immediate relief, "inevitable remorse and decisive re-
crimination would scar our spirit as a people [as] we saw the consequences of what we had done." His solution remains that of his predecessors: to postpone such painful "withdrawal symptoms" simply by continuing the war, with its cost in American and Vietnamese lives. That is the course of the addict; it may be the major hidden basis for our Government's addiction to this war over so many years and so many disappointments. It is not, as he presents it, the hard, courageous way to address this real problem, but the politically easy way, for the short run—easier than admitting past mistakes and facing painful consequences. It is not "the right way."

It seems clear that the President believes this to be a just war, one he would feel dishonored to disown. In

of

and

resulting

he remarks

CRISIS?
the initialNixon's
guilt!

if he

Notes Pres Speech (20)

line 21

" 'hand-over' "

see marginal query — word
to be substituted?

his speech, he discusses the consequences of disengagement in emotional words—"defeat . . . betrayal . . . humiliation"—that warn of years ^{more} ~~more~~ war. He implies a sense of U.S. responsibility for political developments in South Vietnam that can be discharged only by indefinite combat engagement. His plan for "winning a just peace" is a plan for continuing U.S. involvement indefinitely—not at all a plan for ending it. ^{of}

It is a policy that must goad the Hanoi leadership to challenge it by increasing the pressure of U.S. casualties; to which the President promises to respond by re-escalation ⁱⁿ against all past evidence (and consistent, reliable intelligence predictions) that this would neither deter nor end such pressure. In fact, we have heard a plan not only for continuing the war but also for returning it to levels—in fire ^{power} ~~power~~, commitment of prestige, destruction inflicted—recently abandoned. It is a plan and a speech we might have heard, without surprise, from Johnson, Rusk, or Rostow: indeed, we have, many times. ^{that we}

Johnson's War lives.

understood as weakness or sentimentality, and possibly even as treason. That is one of the risks, in fact, of defining a conflict as involving "vital interests."

Every President since 1945 has faced that challenge in every major confrontation. For, after all, as I have said, it has always served the purposes of the Executive to define the enemy we were facing as a Hitler. Or, if that were too implausible with respect to the immediate enemy, we pointed to the larger enemies behind him that made it more plausible; China ~~or~~ ^{for example, or Russia behind} Russia, ~~for example,~~ behind Ho Chi Minh, ~~and~~ ^{and} Castro, respectively. In those circumstances, every President has knowingly faced the challenge that if he allowed this country to "lose" in a confrontation, if he allowed a "Communist victory" to take place without his having used the weapons that World War II had placed--physically and morally--in his hands, he was subject to being charged with ~~weakness~~ ^{timidity}, or incompetence, or treason. That apprehension has had a strong effect on Presidential decision-making ever since.

From 1961 to 1963, I worked ^{about half of each year in Washington} in the Pentagon as a consultant, ^{mainly} I discovered, in the course of this work, ~~that there existed in our armed forces people who would have been quite capable of writing, on demand, plans for the Nazi General Staff, though I still did not see their work in just those terms.~~ ^{Or more specifically, for the SS, if they had been transplanted to America.} These were people ^{colonels and generals}

Much of this work had to do with our plans for controlling ~~using~~ ^{using} nuclear ~~forces~~ ^{weapons}. This meant working among staff officers in our armed forces ^{many of them} ~~dedicated~~, conscientious, overworked individuals -- who, it was evident,

disposed to imagining ^{contingency and general war} in fact, writing, plans for the ^{the final solution to the Communist problem.} genocide of entire nations: Always to be used, of course, only in the event of provocation; though, for that matter, Hitler had always acted under what he described as provocation.

These plans for genocide were to be implemented not only in retaliation against nuclear attack, but against, say, the Russians' taking Berlin, or other moderate-sized confrontations with Russians in Europe, or in the Middle East, or with China in the offshore islands of Quemoy and Matsu, or somewhere else.

There were patriotic Americans, capable, in other words, of planning the annihilation of hundreds of millions of people, acts of "escalatory genocide" that would have dwarfed those of Hitler or of anyone else in world history. I began to have the feeling then that I was reading the Nuremberg Documents for the second time in my life, and perhaps not the last.

The general nature of these genocidal "contingency" plans for nuclear warfare was known to ^{a number of civilians} many civilians working at a high level in the Department of Defense, ^(1961 on) from early

As I commented at the War Crimes Conference in 1970:

"It is not unusual for officials to ask, as they draw up such plans: Are these prudent? Are these mistaken?

But it is most unusual--almost unknown--for them to ask as well: Does the United States have a right to do such things? And if not, so these officials have a duty to participate or a duty to resist?"¹² The main issue

Don,
you've just said
that you didn't
see this work
in these terms.
The question of
your own change
of vision is unclear.

[Handwritten signature]

crimes that blunted conscience:

Things that would have shocked and horrified me in 1934, such as the assassination of opposition leaders, the persecution of the Jews, the incarceration and torture of innocent men in concentration camps, I tolerated as unfortunate excesses in 1935; and things I couldn't have stomached in 1935 were palatable a few years later. This happened in one way or another to all of us in Germany. As the Nazi environment enveloped us, its evils grew invisible-- because we were part of them. Ep. 7

extract

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- 10 -

cadre team to remain overnight.

D. ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS REQUIRING US/GVN AGREEMENTS

1. Air/Artillery and Revolutionary Development

Although we have not studied the matter in depth, we regard it as important for the USG and GVN to know more about the actual impact of the current pattern of bombing and artillery on rural attitudes relevant to RD. It is possible that the negative impact - particularly, of strikes not in immediate support of ground action - is considerable, sustaining villagers' tendencies to collaborate with the VC and limiting the prospects for progress in RD. At the same time, it is possible that additional constraints on these operations would have serious military penalties. Thus the issue is important; but adequate data is not now available, either on the objective consequences of these strikes in terms of VC and civilians killed and injured, or on the attitudinal consequences. (RAND reports on its prisoner and Chieu Hoi interrogations do not adequately fill this gap.)

RECOMMEND:

That on an urgent basis an adequate research effort be launched to determine the actual physical and attitudinal consequences of present policies and practices concerning air and artillery; by methods including comprehensive sampling of opinions, both in the affected areas and elsewhere, and operations to discover the objective results of sample air and artillery missions.

2. MAP Support System

In order to improve US leverage needed to force the GVN into reforms, without which it is unlikely to reach its goals, certain of our approaches to military and economic aid to the Republic of Viet Nam need to be changed. One of these is the Military Assistance Program.

The basic concept of the program is laudable in that it respects the sovereignty of the RVN, it encourages the development of skills and sense of responsibility within GVN military organizations, and it provides the training and actual logistics experience needed to continue a viable institution after termination

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TO: ☐ The Secretary of State
☐ The Secretary of Defense
☐ The Director of Central Intelligence

SUBJECT: ☐ Reporting and Compensation of Civilian Damage in
☐ South Vietnam

(1) ☐ The President has directed that the Secretary of Defense, with the assistance of the Secretary of State and the Director of Central Intelligence, establish procedures assuring regular reporting on as comprehensive a basis as possible of damage to civilian lives and property caused by US, RVNAF and other allied operations. As a base point for this reporting, a study should establish on as realistic a basis as possible the magnitude of past and current damage, using all available sources for this estimate, and establish the nature of current gaps in our knowledge and reporting.

(2) ☐ The Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense will evaluate the adequacy in scale and promptness of current programs for compensating civilian victims, providing medical aid for civilian injured, and handling refugees, and recommend needed improvements, including U.S. support costs.

They maintain this was a tentative study made by people who were not aware of all of the evidence. I asked what evidence. They said, among other things, telephone calls between the Secretary of Defense and the President. This was the sort of thing they said that the people who prepared the study could not have known. What significance that had I didn't know then nor do I know now because I don't know what that could have been that would have related to the actual occurrences of the incidents which have taken place or are alleged to have taken place in the Gulf of Tonkin.

Do you know where that study is now? *

#7 Mr. ELLSBERG: It so happens that that is a study which was extremely hard for the Secretary of Defense to get hold of from the JCS in fact ²/_m

#7 The CHAIRMAN: From whom?

#7 Mr. ELLSBERG: I think it was only your interest in it, if I remember the stories that I have heard, that led the Secretary of Defense to use extraordinary pressures to spring that one loose from the Joint Staff.

#7 The CHAIRMAN: Do you have it?

Mr. ELLSBERG: For him to see it.

#7 The CHAIRMAN: Have you seen it?

Director of the / #7 Mr. ELLSBERG: Yes, in connection with a study that I was doing in 1965 of crisis decisionmaking, I saw it with permission of the Joint Staff.

#7 The CHAIRMAN: I don't wish to take the time now, but I would be very interested if you could supply to the committee a memorandum at a later date at your leisure, if you feel so inclined, to give us more information.

FN #7 In June, 1971, following the release of "The Pentagon Papers" through *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and other papers, a full copy of the WSEG Report on the Tonkin Gulf incident was finally delivered to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (and to the House) on a classified (again Top Secret) basis by the Department of Defense, accompanying full sets of the classified "Pentagon Papers." Although its conclusions are superseded by Anthony Austin's findings, it is still a highly revealing study to which the public should have access by now; Congress should arrange for its declassification and release. ROM